Department of Human Services

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Thursday, March 13, 2008

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Michigan Report

March 12, 2008

HOUSE PANELS 'FRUSTRATED' WITH D.H.S. OVER SLOW IMPROVEMENT

At a Wednesday meeting with a last minute change in the agenda to ask the Department of Human Services about an unfavorable audit, a few lawmakers from the House Appropriations Human Services Subcommittee and House Families and Children's Services Committee expressed frustration with the department's performance, at one point suggesting that perhaps the auditor general should take over DHS, since he seems to have more answers to give than the department.

The meeting was originally scheduled to tackle a report on the DHS' childcare program. However, said Ron Hicks, legislative liaison for the department, the committee informed DHS that it would host auditor general staff on Tuesday and that DHS should be prepared to answer questions about the audit (See Gongwer Michigan Report, March 7, 2008).

But, because of scheduling conflicts, auditors couldn't make it this week, leaving DHS staff members to answer lawmakers' complaints that the although the department seems to agree with the report's findings, it is slow to do anything to address high case loads and error rates.

Donald Mussen, DHS director of family support services, told the committees that although staff agree that improvements, such as a workload study to determine the optimum level or staff, must be made, they want to wait until at least the first round of the Bridges computer program is initiated to do the audit's suggested study.

Rep. John Stahl (R-North Branch) said that he isn't as "optimistic" as Mr. Mussen that Bridges will be rolled out by next year, "especially given the track record."

He said that the department needs more oversight now on what each worker is doing and can't wait for Bridges any longer.

Rep. Jack Hoogendyk (R-Texas Twp.) wanted to know how the department can consistently claim to be understaffed if it hasn't yet done a workload study.

"Maybe the auditor general should take over because they have a lot of recommendations," he said.

Rep. Shanelle Jackson (D-Detroit) said she'd "invite any representative to Wayne County to see how overworked their workers are," adding that in her experience, workers have too many clients to handle all of their needs adequately.

Mr. Mussen and Mr. Hicks said that taking a trip to a field office isn't a bad idea but that lawmakers can also access data collected by the department to show how workers spend their days.

That information is precise and shows that some workers have as many as 600 cases, they said. Also, they added, many staff to client ratios are above the national standard.

However, Mr. Mussen added, DHS now relies on managers from each field office to follow-up on mistakes and efficiency problems.

"We know we need to tighten that," Mr. Mussen said, again adding that Bridges is part of the solution because it will allow for more reporting and information sharing.

Subcommittee Chair Rep. Dudley Spade (D-Franklin Twp.) said that it's great that DHS recognizes the need for change, but his frustration comes from not acting on that need.

"Someone might look at this (audit) and say that DHS agrees (with the recommendations) but isn't going to do anything," he said.

Mr. Hoogendyk asked DHS staff members if they are confident that they are doing everything possible to be efficient with the funding they have, especially in light of the 150 positions the Legislature added last year.

"Do you think perhaps other states are less top heavy, have less administration and use that money for staffing?" he asked.

DHS Deputy Director Jim Nye said that the department hasn't compared funding from other states but has looked at their processes, which tells him that they all operate differently, making comparisons difficult.

He said that while DHS is thankful for the extra positions, of which 86 have yet to be filled, the increase in caseloads has outpaced the increase in staffing levels.

For example, Mr. Nye said, at 80 percent, Michigan has the highest food stamp participation rate of any large state and the eighth highest overall.

Committee Chair Rep. Brenda Clack (D-Flint) said that she understands that the "unique economic climate" of Michigan has contributed to "tremendous caseloads."

"We're going to have to rectify that," she said, "but I don't know how in our economy."

In 1997, relatives reported that Calista Springer was hit, denied food

Posted by Rex Hall Jr. | Gazette

March 13, 2008 08:56AM

CENTREVILLE -- Two aunts and a grandmother of Calista Springer told police in 1997 they believed the girl was being abused by her parents, according to a Michigan State Police report released Wednesday.

A state trooper forwarded the allegations to child-welfare officials, who investigated and said they found "no evidence" that Calista, then 6, was being abused or neglected by her parents.

Trooper Daniel Thayer's initial report in June 1997 cited interviews with the relatives who alleged that Calista's father, Anthony Springer, hit her in the face, denied her food and locked Calista and her two sisters in their bedroom at night.

Calista Springer in her sixth-grade yearbook picture.

In his interview with Thayer, Anthony Springer denied abusing Calista but acknowledged that he once inadvertently bloodied her nose, and also spanked her for falling down the stairs and splitting her lip. Anthony

Springer also told the trooper that his wife, Marsha, had hit Calista in the face.

Calista told the trooper that her father had never hit her but her mother had. The girl said she was not fearful of her father but she was scared of her mother.

After interviewing Calista, her father and the relatives, Thayer consulted with a child-welfare worker who advised him the girl could not be removed from the home at that point because she had "no fresh visible injuries" and "no fear of going home."

In the wake of last month's fire that killed Calista in her Centreville home while she was chained to her bed, the state watchdog over the child-welfare system is investigating the Michigan Department of Human Service's past interactions with the 16-year-old girl. DHS has also initiated its own inquiry.

Read more

Documents reveal troubled family life -- March 4, 2008

Two probes reviewing state's actions -- March 4, 2008

Centreville says goodbye -- March 3, 2008

Tragic death saddens Centreville -- March 1, 2008

Details emerge in fatal fire -- Feb. 29, 2008

Girl who died in

The Kalamazoo Gazette obtained a copy of Thayer's June 9, 1997, report Wednesday under the Michigan Freedom of Information Act. The seven-page document provides the new details in interviews with Anthony Springer's sister, Valerie Springer; his mother, Suzanne Langdon; and his sister-in-law, Linda Springer.

Centreville fire was confined to her bed -- Feb. 29, 2008

The Gazette was unable to reach any of the three women for comment for this report.
Reached by telephone Wednesday, Anthony Springer said, "We don't have any comments." Lawyers for Anthony and Marsha Springer did not return calls.

Bruises, burns reported
Thayer's investigation was initiated by a report from Marsha Springer who claimed that her sister-in-law had failed to bring Calista home after an overnight stay.

Thayer then interviewed Valerie Springer, who told the trooper she was concerned Calista's parents were physically abusing the girl. Valerie Springer said she had moved back to Michigan six weeks earlier and in that time had noticed on four occasions Calista had bruising on her face. In one instance, Valerie Springer said, Calista said that her lips were cut open because her father hit her in the mouth.

Valerie Springer also said she found cigarette burns on Calista's arm, and noted that in the past Calista had suffered broken bones, severe bruising and at one point doctors thought the girl had a crushed cheekbone.

"Valerie said that she wanted all this reported because she was very scared of her brother and of what he might do to Calista," Thayer wrote. "She said he has no concept of right and wrong and that it would not surprise her if Calista came up missing and her remains were found years later."

Michigan State Police continue to investigate the fire that killed Calista but they have said there is no evidence it was intentionally set. Investigators believe the fire was likely caused by a vacuum cleaner Marsha Springer was using. Police are also investigating why Calista was chained to her bed by her parents, who have said it was a safety measure because the girl would wander at night.

Bedrooms locked
In Thayer's 1997 investigation, no allegations were made that Calista was chained to her bed. However, Langdon and Linda Springer told the trooper Calista and her two sisters were locked in their bedroom.

"Linda also told me that Marsha has told her that Anthony locks the girls in their bedroom at night," Thayer wrote. "The bedroom windows have bars on them and the door has a lock from the outside."

Langdon also said she saw "hand shaped slap marks" on the faces of all three girls, the report says. Langdon said the couple had money for beer and cigarettes but they "do not buy food for the girls."

When Thayer interviewed Calista, the girl told him that Marsha Springer had hit her but she referred to her father as "a good boy."

"She was not in any way fearful of going home," Thayer wrote. "I asked her if she was scared of Daddy and she said no, just Mommy."

Anthony Springer was Calista's biological father and Marsha became her adopted mother in May 1997.

Anthony Springer told the trooper that his wife had hit Calista. Anthony Springer went on to say that Calista had high levels of lead in her blood and he and Marsha were constantly telling her to keep things out of her mouth.

Eating disorder reported
Marcia Griffin, superintendent and principal at Nottawa Community School, said Calista began kindergarten there exhibiting signs of pica, an eating disorder where the girl attempted to consume unusual, nonfood items. Griffin said school officials worked with the girl and Marsha Springer to find ways to control the behavior.

Thayer forwarded the 1997 report to a DHS caseworker. On Oct. 2, 1997, Thayer closed the case with a one-page supplemental report, attaching a DHS document, which was not released to the Gazette.

Thayer wrote that DHS had "conducted an investigation into the allegations made by Valerie Springer and her family. After several interviews and in-home visits, etc. the case worker, Sheila Schill, came to the conclusion that there is no evidence of abuse or neglect on either Anthony or Marsha's part."

Fred Upton's office told in 2004 that Calista Springer case was 'under control'

Posted by Kathy Jessup | Kalamazoo Gazette

March 13, 2008 09:48AM

WASHINGTON -- Congressman Fred Upton's Washington staff is re-examining its procedures for handling constituent reports of alleged child abuse in the aftermath of the death of 16-year-old Calista Springer.

Upton's office has turned over to investigators all correspondence it received in 2004 from a St. Joseph County resident who e-mailed the staff alleging Calista, then 13, was being abused, Joan Hillebrands, Upton's chief of staff, said Wednesday.

The Republican congressman's office also has given police and prosecutors copies of the Nov. 17, 2004, referral it sent to St. Joseph County Children's Protective Services, a division of the Michigan Department of Human Services.

The agency's Dec. 2, 2004, response that said the allegations had been investigated, Hillebrands said.

"We were assured it was under control," Hillebrands said. "There was nothing in the response we received from (the child-welfare agency) that set off any alarms.

"In the 20 to 25 years we've been handling these kinds of reports, we've never had cause to question when they tell us they've been (to a home) several times and the case has been handled. We've never had a case this bad."

As new allegations of past abuse of Calista come to light, Hillebrands said in the future Upton's office may contact state and local police, in addition to Children's Protective Services, when it receives reports that a child may be in danger.

"I think everyone is asking if more could have been done," Hillebrands said. "How did we get a letter back saying everything was fine when it was not?"

Calista died Feb. 27 in a fire in her family's Centreville home while she was chained to her bed. Reports obtained by the Kalamazoo Gazette show authorities were told as early as 2004 of allegations that Calista was being chained to her bed and reports of alleged abuse were investigated as far back as 1997.

Upton's office on Wednesday declined to release copies of the 2004 communications, saying congressional rules prohibit the public disclosure of specific constituent correspondence by the federal offices.

Hillebrands said they gave the correspondence to investigators on March 4, believing the e-mail, fax and letter records "could potentially be evidence."

Michigan State Police continue to investigate the fire and the circumstances that led parents Anthony and Marsha Springer to chain Calista to her bed.

"It is now time for the professionals to follow every lead and prevent this from ever happening again."

Flint, Mich. police take fresh look at teen's mysterious disappearance

by Ron Fonger | The Flint Journal

Wednesday March 12, 2008, 3:58 PM

FLINT, MICHIGAN -- She was barely 14 when Coral P. Hall made a desperate call from the pay phone at Ann Arbor and Court streets near the White Horse Tavern.

There was trouble at home, Hall told her friend Melissa Pierce, and she needed to get out of Flint.

Almost 10 years later, Pierce still remembers that unnerving late-night call to her home in Michigan's Thumb and how by the time her boyfriend and uncle made the long drive to Flint, Hall had vanished into the night.

"They couldn't find her," Pierce said. "They looked around, they drove down streets looking for her, and they couldn't find her."

Years after friends grew frustrated at the lack of movementprogress in solving Hall's disappearance, Flint police are taking a fresh look at her case, assigning it to the city's Violent Crime Task Force.

Since Hall's disappearance was profiled in The Flint Journal last month, police have received new calls about the case. Old friends such as Pierce believe there are still people here who might know what happened to the blonde-haired girl with a scar on the lower part of her neck.

Hall would be 23 years old today.

"Because of the interest the story generated we are definitely looking into it again," said Flint Detective Sgt. Greg Hosmer.

Hall was reported missing on Sept. 22, 1998, and both friends and family say they never heard from her after she called Pierce for help.

Lois Janish, Hall's grandmother, said she had been fighting with her granddaughter about missing school before she turned up missing.

Hall's mother died of a drug overdose in 1996 and had given up custody of her daughter shortly after she was born. Probate court records say her father was unknown.

Growing up in poverty and in neighborhoods that were sometimes filled with drug users and predators, friends believe Hall likely ran into a situation she couldn't escape from -- maybe without ever leaving Flint.

And they say there are still clues to what happened. Among them:

Two friends --Â Melissa Jackson and Tanya Boillat --Â gave police a

planner that belonged to Hall. The book with a torn cover included names and phone numbers that they believe might help police in their investigation.
Hosmer said he believes the planner is part of an evidence file that still exists and wants to see Hall's notes and telephone numbers she kept in the book.
Pierce said she took Hall to the Michigan Department of Human Services to report she was being abused or neglected on the same day she later turned up missing.
The Journal requested any such complaints from DHS under the Freedom of Information Act last week.
More than two years before she turned up missing, Burton police received a report that Hall had been left in a dangerous situation by a man not related to her.
A police report from 1996 --Â when she was just 11 --Â said Hall was left in a vehicle parked on North Dort Highway -- a strip known for its bars and gentleman's clubs.
Pierce, who now lives out of the state, said she befriended Hall in summer 1998 while they lived in the same apartment building.
"We became really good friends," said Pierce, who moved to the tiny village of Applegate, before Hall turned up missing.
About a month after leaving Flint, Pierce said she got the call from Hall, asking for her help.
"She just said grandma and her had a fight, and she couldn't deal with it no more and for us to come and get her," she said.
"The next day we got a picture and went and made fliers and started putting them up. Every time we put them up, somebody would take them down."
Boillat and Jackson, childhood friends of Hall, said they have been frustrated that their friend's case was never resolved.
"We met on the playground and just started hanging out," said Jackson, who still wears an inexpensive ring that her friend gave her. "She was like my sister."
Boillat and Jackson turned Hall's planner over to police in 2004 but never heard from investigators or their friend again.
"If she was alive today, I know for a fact that Coral would have contacted us," said Boillat, who fears her friend was killed.
Pierce said she also doesn't picture the young teen as a runaway but the victim of a predator.
"She would have called me (if she was a runaway). She had my number," Pierce said. "Me and Coral were really good friends. We would sit and talk about anything that was bothering her.

"She's not a runaway."
Janish said she has tried to stay hopeful even without any good news but sometimes struggles to remain optimistic.
"I try to have good feelings," she said, "but I have my doubts. That's been my worst fear all these years --Â that she's not alive."

The County Press

Turrill mother protests suspension of son from school

by JENNIFER DECKER
STAFF REPORTER

LAPEER — Aimee Quintana is prepared to protest outside Turrill Elementary School on South Elm Street in Lapeer each morning until her son, Darion, is reinstated from suspension or the other child involved in a bullying incident is disciplined.

Quintana picketed on the sidewalk outside of Turrill on Monday to demonstrate her discontent at the school's handling of a recent bullying incident. She said Darion, 8, was in a fight with a bully.Ô "My son has been suspended 10 days and the school is doing nothing about it," she said.

"They're doing nothing about bullies. I demanded to talk to the other kid's parents because there was a fight and the other kid came up and punched his eye. My son said he ran to four authority figures and they did nothing."

Beth Rayl, Turrill principal, and Lauren Murphy, Lapeer Community Schools spokesperson, said they could not comment on the matter because it involved an incident of student discipline.

Quintana said she's concerned because she felt the school has security issues. "Parents need to stick up for our kids more," she said. "There's seven other kids being bullied by this boy. Instead of separating the boys, the principal had the bully sit in back of my son when she knew there was problems. They did nothing to stop the bully."

Quintana said she's protesting for her son or "to do just on the other side."

"The principal is supposed to be the protector of our school, but she'd done nothing," she said. Quintana said LCS administration allegedly won't talk to her because she's protesting.

"I want to protest until my son is put back in school or there's justice on the other side by suspending the other kid," Quintana said.

Police were called to the protesting Quintana. She said officers told her it was her Constitutional right to protest. One of the officers told her bullying was a problem throughout Lapeer County.

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OAK PARK

Principal's testimony takes a turn

She says she didn't see mom with son

BY L.L. BRASIER • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • March 13, 2008

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The principal at Key Elementary School in Oak Park took the witness stand Wednesday against former teacher James Perry and told jurors a dramatically different story from one she gave under oath in a civil deposition in 2006.

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Brenda Snow is considered a key prosecution witness in the case against Perry, 34, accused of molesting two small boys in an empty special-education room during a lunch break at Key in October 2005.

Snow has consistently maintained, and continued to maintain Wednesday, that she had ordered that special-education children eat in a room other than their classroom -- a key point to prosecutors who say the room was empty. But her testimony then veered sharply from her sworn testimony in her civil deposition.

In that deposition, she said the mother of the boy, newly enrolled in mid-semester on Oct. 12, approached her at lunchtime, upset she could not locate her 5-year-old. Snow said she walked the mother down the hallway toward the boy's classroom, and watched as the mother was reunited with the boy on the playground.

On Wednesday, she said the mother approached her and she directed her toward the boy's classroom, but never saw the boy. She said she told the mother to return if she was unable to find the child and assumed she had, since she did not return. The mother would later say she found the child near the special-education room, where police say Perry attacked the two boys.

This is Perry's second trial. Circuit Judge Denise Langford Morris tossed a 2006 conviction after learning that police did not interview the three adults who were assigned to the special-education room, all who say children ate lunch there. Those adults are expected to testify in this trial.

Much of the testimony so far has been contradictory. One boy, now 8, claims he was alone, and snatched from a supervised lunch line in the hallway outside his classroom. The other boy, now 7, says they were both snatched from the cafeteria, and that Perry had the 8-year-old stand outside the special-education room while Perry assaulted him, then took the 8-year-old into the room and assaulted him.

Assistant Prosecutor Andrea Dean maintains the boys' accounts of the actual assaults have been consistent.

*Contact **L.L. BRASIER** at 248-858-2262 or brasier@freepress.com.*

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THE OAKLAND PRESS

Ill. mom goes to trial for briefly leaving child in car; case sparks Internet debate

By DON BABWIN
Associated Press Writer

CHICAGO (AP) -- Treffly Coyne was out of her car for just minutes and no more than 10 yards away.

But that was long and far enough to land her in court after a police officer spotted her sleeping 2-year-old daughter alone in the vehicle; Coyne had taken her two older daughters to pour $8.29 in coins into a Salvation Army kettle.

Minutes later, she was under arrest -- the focus of both a police investigation and a probe by the state's child welfare agency. Now the case that has become an Internet flash point for people who either blast police for overstepping their authority or Coyne for putting a child in danger.

The 36-year-old suburban mother is preparing to go on trial Thursday on misdemeanor charges of child endangerment and obstructing a peace officer. If convicted, she could be sentenced to a year in jail and fined $2,500, even though child welfare workers found no credible evidence of abuse or neglect.

On Dec. 8 Coyne decided to drive to Wal-Mart in the Chicago suburb of Crestwood so her children and a young friend could donate the coins they'd collected at her husband's office.

Even as she buckled 2-year-old Phoebe into the car, the girl was asleep. When Coyne arrived at the store, she found a spot to park in a loading zone, right behind someone tying a Christmas tree onto a car.

"It's sleeting out, it's not pleasant, I don't want to disturb her, wake her up," Coyne said this week. "It was safer to leave her in the safety and warmth of an alarmed car than take her."

So Coyne switched on the emergency flashers, locked the car, activated the alarm and walked the other children to the bell ringer.

She snapped a few pictures of the girls donating money and headed back to the car. But a community service officer blocked her way.

"She was on a tirade, she was yelling at me," Coyne said. The officer, Coyne said, didn't want to hear about how close Coyne was, how she never set foot inside the store and was just there to let the kids donate money, or how she could always see her car.

Coyne telephoned her husband, Tim Janecyk, who advised her not to say anything else to police until he arrived. So Coyne declined to talk further, refusing even to tell police her child's name.

When Janecyk pulled up, his wife already was handcuffed, sitting in a patrol car.

Crestwood Police Chief Timothy Sulikowski declined to comment about the case. But he did not dispute the contention that Coyne parked nearby or was away from her car for just a few minutes.

He did, however, suggest Coyne put her child at risk.

"A minute or two, that's when things can happen," he said.

Talk about the case has intensified, particularly online, where bloggers are weighing in on various message boards.

Many have harsh words for the police department, calling the arrest of a mother who left her child in a locked car for a few minutes an abuse of authority.

Yet statistics show thousands of children are injured and dozens die every year after being left unattended near or inside vehicles.

"I am talking tens of thousands of people who leave their kids in the car for any period of time all around America," said Janette Fennell, founder and president of Kansas-based Kids and Cars. "People don't appreciate the dangers of leaving a child alone in the car."

Coyne's attorney, Michelle Forbes, argued that Coyne did not break the law any more than a mother who parks in front of a school in a rainstorm and leaves an infant in the car as she runs a few feet to pick up another child.

"As long as the car is not out of her sight, then the child is not unattended," she said.

Cars with children inside have been stolen while the owners stepped inside service stations to pay for gas, Fennell said. Children sitting in cars have choked on things they stuck in their mouths. On Tuesday in Houston, after a woman got out of her car to walk across the street to talk to someone, her toddler was killed after he climbed out and tried to follow her.

"That child was also 2," Fennell said, referring to Coyne's daughter.

Coyne and her husband believe she is unfairly being lumped in with parents who put their children's lives at risk.

"If I were going on a shopping spree then, yes, I would deserve arrest," Coyne said. "I was standing right there. I never went into the store.

"I'm a great parent."

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THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

Mom dead, dad jailed, boy in limbo

Thursday, March 13, 2008

By John Agar

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- They lost their daughter, Julia Dawson, allegedly strangled by her husband, Timothy Dawson.

They don't want to lose their grandson, too.

Ada Township residents Kevin and Tamara Keenan are fighting Dawson's new wife in Texas for custody of 4-year-old Alexander Dawson.

Dawson and his young son left for Texas about six months after his wife's body was found Jan. 3, 2005. He remarried and had another son before his arrest in late January.

Just days after his arrest, Dawson signed an affidavit asking to relinquish rights to Alexander -- and requested in the affidavit that Billie Jane Dean, his wife of two years, have his parental rights "until I am able to rejoin my children."

"I believe that Billie Jane Dean's custody of Alex Dawson is in the best interest of the child," Dawson said in the affidavit, signed while he was jailed in Texas, before his return to Michigan to face a murder charge.

The affidavit is in court records in Kerr County, Texas, where Dawson and his son started a new life in July 2005. He married Dean in January 2006, and they had a son.

After his wife's killing, Dawson tried to keep the Keenans from seeing their grandson. But the grandparents won visitation rights in a case that reached the Michigan Court of Appeals.

The Keenans contended in recently filed court papers that their appointment as "temporary managing conservators is necessary because the child's present circumstances would significantly impair the child's physical health or emotional development."

The Keenans asked for the exclusive right to decide where the child lives and requested a "social study" of how the child is faring, as well as an examination of the home of anyone wanting custody rights or access to him.

The Keenans, who earlier said they would seek custody, and attorneys for both sides did not return calls.

At the heart of the case is the best interest of the child, said Earl Jackson, a Dallas attorney. He specializes in Texas family law but has no ties to this case.

Generally, the grandparents have a legal "leg up" in determining custody, he said.

"There's a presumption in the Texas Family Code that says the court should look to the grandparents as an adoptive parent before it looks to anybody else," he said.

The court could also be concerned that a woman would support a husband accused of murder.

But the court could also consider that Alexander, nearly 5, has spent a big part of his life with a stepmother

who raised him as her own. He also has a stepbrother.

"These are all factors that come into it," Jackson said.

If both sides dig in, the case could go on for some time, he said.

The Keenans know about waiting for justice. Their daughter disappeared Dec. 11, 2004, her body turning up 22 days later north of Sparta, where the couple lived. Sheriff's detectives say they have a circumstantial case, built in part on phone records that put Dawson near the scene where the body was found.

Police say Dawson also cleaned a large area of carpet with bleach just before he reported his wife missing Dec. 12, 2004. Police say he killed her because she planned to leave him.

Dawson has denied killing his wife. He awaits a probable-cause hearing later this month.

He did not acknowledge the police belief that Julia Dawson died Dec. 11, 2004. He said Julia Dawson was "deceased on or about January 2005," presumably when her body was found.

Send e-mail to the author: jagar@grpress.com

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Detroit Free Press

March 13, 2008

BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP: Former Lion pleads no contest

Former Detroit Lion Robert Porcher pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor assault and battery charge Wednesday, court records show.

Porcher was arrested Dec. 10 on charges he assaulted his ex-wife, Kimberly, in a doctor's office on Woodward Avenue in the township. He faces a maximum of 98 days in jail and a $500 fine.

District Judge Kimberly Small is to sentence Porcher next month.

The Detroit News detnews.com

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Thursday, March 13, 2008

Ex-Lion to be sentenced for assault

Associated Press

BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP -- Former Detroit Lions defensive end Robert Porcher will be sentenced next month on a charge that he assaulted his ex-wife.

Porcher pleaded no contest to the charge Wednesday in an Oakland County court. His sentencing was set for April 3.

Porcher was arrested on the misdemeanor assault and battery charge in December after an employee at a doctor's office in the 43000 block of Woodward reported a domestic violence complaint.

The charge is punishable by up to 93 days in jail and a $500 fine.

Court records show Porcher and his wife Kimberly divorced in 2006. They have three children.

Porcher, 38, is a native of Wando, S.C., and played college ball at South Carolina State. He played 13 seasons for the Lions. Retiring in 2004, he held the franchise record for sacks.

An attempt to contact Porcher's lawyer was unsuccessful.

Detroit News Staff Writer Mark Hicks contributed to this report.

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More than 600 uninsured die prematurely each year

By PATRICIA ANSTETT • FREE PRESS MEDICAL WRITER • March 13, 2008

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Not having health insurance can be deadly, a growing problem that accounts for deaths of 650 Michiganders a year, nearly two a day, a national report released Thursday concludes.

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Uninsured people "live sicker and die earlier," said Ron Pollack, executive director of Families USA, a national nonprofit consumer health organization, speaking in a telephone news briefing. He said that premature deaths among the uninsured nationwide are twice the rates of people who are killed by homicide. The problem is growing in Michigan as more employers drop health coverage and people find insurance premiums too costly to purchase their own coverage.

The report used mathematical methods used by two highly reputable agencies, the Institute of Medicine, a nonprofit federal agency which studied the issue in 2002, and the Urban Institute, which updated the figures in 2006. Both reports took federal statistics on people who lacked insurance and estimated that 25% died prematurely.

The problem is largely unrecognized, said Sister Mary Ellen Howard, director of the Cabrini Clinic, a free clinic in Detroit that is the nation's oldest such center in the United States. "You will never read that this person died because they are uninsured," she said. The cause of death will be listed as stroke or cancer, for example, she said. "It won't say this person didn't have screening for cancer, was diagnosed late and not treated appropriately because she was uninsured."

Howard said legislation pending in Lansing to allow Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan to set its own rates without prior approval from the state's Office of Financial and Insurance Services would make problems worse by extending from six months to 12 months the time in which the insurer can choose not to enroll people in health policies.

"I'm afraid that in 12 months many people will die because they don't have insurance," she said. "We have to protect them even more."

Blue Cross is seeking the changes to offset losses from its individual policies and to allow more flexibility in their pricing from year to year, rather than seeking prior state approval, a time-consuming process.

Rep. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., called the report "a wakeup call for all of us, that we have got to make a commitment to universal health care coverage and access in this country."

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AuSable Free Clinic staff becomes full-time

by Dan Sanderson-Staff Writer

Increasing demand for medical care at the AuSable Free Clinic prompted the move to have its staff work full-time last fall.

The AuSable Free Clinic recently received a $20,850 grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, which will help fund the transition of having the clinic's two employees work full-time.

In August, Jeanne Hufnagel, the AuSable Free Clinic director, and her administrative assistant, Jessica Sanford, became full time employees.

Their salaries are funded by the Blue Cross Blue Shield grant, and Mercy Hospital Grayling, which also provides their health insurance and benefits.

In 2007, the clinic served 959 people. This is over the combined amount of patients the clinic, which opened in 2005, has served in the previous two years.

The demands for services, the need to recruit more doctors and nurses to volunteer at the clinic and the need to provide access to free medications prompted the need to go full-time.

"We're trying to streamline the program, and having a full-time staff is making it much more efficient," said Michael Matuzak, the president of the AuSable Free Clinic Board of Directors.

The AuSable Free Clinic recently received a $20,850 grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, which will help fund the transition of having the clinic's two employees work full-time. In August, Jeanne Hufnagel, (above left) the AuSable Free Clinic director, and her administrative assistant, Jessica Sanford, (right) became full time employees. (Photo by Dan Sanderson)

Hufnagel attributed the increased demand for medical care to people who do not have medical insurance or have jobs that don't provide health insurance or where the employer has eliminated health insurance coverage.

"These are depressed areas, and these people really need help," she said.

The clinic also treats Medicaid and Medicare patients who are required to "spend down" money from their income before they can receive government assistance for health insurance coverage.

"We treat them like they are patients who are not covered, because they have to spend the money out of their own pockets," she said.

The AuSable Free Clinic is open on Thursdays for a three-hour period. The clinic sees an average of 50 patients each Thursday. All people who are signed up by 6 p.m on clinic nights are treated by doctors.

A host of doctors, nurses, social workers and other volunteers staff the clinic each week. High school students and other volunteers also help complete other tasks to help with clinic operations.

"There are a lot of things that need to be done, over and above what we do here on clinic night," Hufnagel said.

The social workers work hand-in-hand with Community Mental Health, and District Health Department #10, to help get patients linked with other medical care.

"We're not here for long-term care," Hufnagel said. "We do a lot of referrals by getting them hooked up with other physicians and health care providers."

One of the goals of the clinic is to recruit more doctors and nurses, so that volunteers would be able to work on a rotating schedule.

"We need some new blood, so we don't burn out the ones that we've got," Hufnagel said. "If it wasn't for the physicians, we wouldn't be able to

stay open."

A majority of patients served at the AuSable Free Clinic come from Crawford County.

The clinic primarily serves people in Mercy Hospital Grayling's service area, which also includes Montmorency, Roscommon and Oscoda counties.

Matuzak said the clinic is striving to make more Oscoda County residents aware of its services.

Dr. Ralph Oppermann from AuSable Family Dental has provided free-dental care to a few clinic patients.

"He takes them from start to finish," Hufnagel said.

The clinic staff is hoping to recruit more dentists to volunteer to provide care.

"It's a tremendous problem, and as we are building for the future, we aspire to be able to add something like that," Matuzak said.

The medical access program at the AuSable Free Clinic has saved over $100,000. The clinic has received vouchers from pharmaceutical companies to provide the medications to its patients, Hufnagel said.

Dr. Lisa Harrington, a physician from the Grayling Family Practice, serves as the AuSable Free Clinic's medical director. Harrington said she is pleased with the results the clinic has been able to accomplish.

"We have a very dedicated crew that is committed to making this work," Harrington said.

Harrington said that the most telling statistic about the clinic is that people are being treated who would normally go without medical treatment or end up in the emergency room.

"That is not an economical way for the hospital or anybody to receive medical care, unless it is an absolute emergency," Harrington said.

The clinic moved from 201 Meadows Drive to 1250 East Michigan Avenue, on Mercy Hospital's campus, last year.

The AuSable Free Clinic's phone number is (989) 348-0740.